

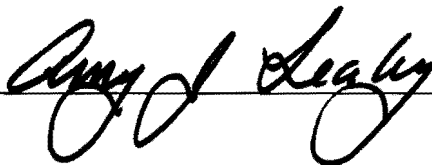
The Los Angeles Fashion District: An Industry of Extremes

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Amy Leahy", is positioned above a horizontal line. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Abstract

The Los Angeles fashion industry has been a driving force in the way America dresses for nearly a century. L.A. has contributed to the nation's fashion movements not only through its lifestyle trendsetting, but also through being one of the United State's top apparel manufacturing centers. While on the surface California boasts affluence and glamour, its less obvious, but equally important, manufacturing industry runs rampant with immigrant workers exploitation. Can a dual-natured industry gain the respect and recognition it takes to be considered an international fashion capital? In order to reach some conclusions, I provide a look at the past and present state of the L.A. fashion district and then discuss what the industry must do in order to reach the status of international fashion capital.

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Introduction

Upon mentioning the Los Angeles fashion industry, most people would have a series of ideas come to mind: Hollywood glamour, “California Cool” lifestyle, surf culture, and celebrity trend setters. As Edna Bonacich and Richard Appelbaum (2000) explain:

The city is a center of design and fashion. The entertainment industry is, through its movies, television, and music, the most visible manifestation of the city’s creation of style. Southern California represents a way of life that is idealized and emulated around the globe. The names Hollywood, California, Disneyland, and even Los Angeles itself conjure up images of fantasy, fun in the sun, the freedom of the western frontier, informality, rebellion, and the end of formal tradition. (p. 17)

While all of these ideas are valid representations of the industry and California style in general, there is also a darker underbelly to these prominent, glitzy fronts. Los Angeles is one of the country’s leading apparel manufacturing cities and, unfortunately, is home to countless “sweat-shop” establishments. In other words, while on the surface California boasts affluence and glamour, its less obvious, but equally important, manufacturing industry runs rampant with immigrant workers being exploited in apparel manufacturing firms with safety and health hazards, less than minimum wages, and on-the-job harassment. How did such a divide occur and where does the future of the industry lie? To answer these questions, it is essential to gain an understanding of the industry’s roots – from Hollywood glamour, to the growth of manufacturing.

In recent years, the L.A. fashion industry has undergone a great deal of growth and improvement, including the establishment of the “LA Fashion District Business Improvement District” (BID) and the success of “fast-fashion” nation- and world-wide. With these progressive efforts, Los Angeles has the potential of becoming a nationally and internationally respected fashion capital. However, this prestigious reputation will not come without considerable effort on the part of industry leaders.

Historic Background

With the boom in motion picture production in the 1920s and 30s, Hollywood, California was at center stage in the public eye. All of the major film studios – the supposed “big five,” including Twentieth Century Fox, MGM, Paramount, RKO, and Warner Brothers, and the “little three,” including Columbia, United Artists, and Universal Pictures – called Hollywood home (Scott, 2005, p. 27). It was at these major film studios that the foundation of Hollywood glamour was laid. Beginning with Gilbert Adrian and his ten-year reign as head costume designer at MGM in the 1930s, and continuing through Irene Lentz Gibbons (also for MGM), Jean Louis for Columbia Pictures, Edith Head for Paramount, and William Travilla of Twentieth Century Fox, costume designers set the stage for not only the fads seen on the big screen, but also the style of dress that influenced the nation (Reilly, 2000). In store for all of these costume designers (aside from Edith Head) was an eventual career in couture. After actresses became fond of the designs worn in films, they often contracted their costume designers to also outfit them off-screen. As the nation looked to their favorite starlets, the costume designers were able to go public, opening retail establishments and carrying their own designer lines. While some remained quite exclusive to their famous and wealthy clientele, others, such as Adrian and Irene, opened their boutique doors to not only celebrities and wealthy “ladies who lunch” but also career women (Reilly, 2000).

With costume designers going commercial and selling their lines to major department stores across the country and in their own Sunset Strip and Wilshire Avenue boutiques, Los Angeles designers made their presence known not only on the big-screen but in the closets of women across the nation. Unarguably, the Hollywood influence from costume designers put Los Angeles on the map as a national and sometimes even international fashion capital.

In addition to the birth of Hollywood glamour, Los Angeles also played a role in the introduction of sportswear, an American fashion staple still today. One of the leaders of this movement was Bonnie Cashin, a California native who began her career at Twentieth Century Fox in 1943 (Reilly, 2000, p. 99). In 1949, she founded her own business, The Knittery, on Seventh Avenue in New York City. Cashin ignored the styles seen coming out of Paris (extravagant, complicated designs, primarily from Christian Dior), and created original designs to fit into what she saw as the active American lifestyle (Reilly, 2000, p. 99). According to Maureen Reilly in *California Casual*, “Cashin infused many designs with a Pacific Rim sensibility” (2001, p. 34). Another leader in California sportswear was Rudi Gernreich, who won the Coty American Fashion Critic’s Award for sportswear in 1960 (a top honor in the American fashion industry) (Reilly, 2001, p. 37). He also made a splash in the 1950s with knit swimwear, an obvious California staple. One of Gernreich’s most famous designs was his cutting edge, and quite racy, topless bathing suit, unveiled in 1964 (Reilly, 2000, p. 168). Gernreich’s fashions were made available to women across the country in 1965, when he began designing special collections for Montgomery Wards (Reilly, 2000, p. 168). With casual attire designed by California names being produced and sold throughout the country in the 1950s and 60s, Los Angeles has always had a hand in the everyday attire worn by men and women across America. So, not only has L.A. continued to set the stage in celebrity trends, but also in the casual styles that clothe the nation.

L.A. Apparel Manufacturing: A look at the Past and Present

With all the fashion design based out of California beginning in the 1930s, it is only natural that California became an apparel manufacturing center. Unfortunately, the history of manufacturing is not as upbeat as its paralleled industry in Hollywood. The garment industry

first began in California during the first half of the twentieth century, when southern California experienced huge amounts of growth and the population doubled each decade from 1900 to 1930 (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 33). This rapid growth was driven by the American dream of owning land that had yet to be tapped. The west coast was one of the final frontiers for settlement. At the same time, the emergence of the Hollywood film industry made the legend “Made in California” of national appeal (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 33). The “California Look” took off: “a description of casual, yet fashionable, moderately priced sportswear, especially for young women, including jeans, swimwear, beachwear, activewear, and light dresses” (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 33).

Not only were the country’s more affluent members of society looking to California for direction, many groups of immigrants, primarily from Mexico and Latin America saw California, Los Angeles in particular, as a land of opportunity and business potential. Offering ideal conditions like plenty of sunshine, a good climate, and a near ocean, as well as a need for labor in the apparel market and other industries, Los Angeles was an ideal location for immigrants to find work and lay down their roots. However, “regardless of numbers, minorities exercised no power in the Anglo-dominated and elite-controlled politics of the city and county, even as these underwent significant changes over time,” explains Janet L. Abu-Lughod (1999, p. 159).

From the inception of apparel manufacturing firms, ethnic conflicts have been extensive with minorities exploiting minorities in both inter-ethnic as well as intra-ethnic situations (Soldatenko, 1999, p. 326). In the 1930s, Jewish business owners managed most garment manufacturing firms and Mexicans made up the primary labor force (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 171). Typically, these Mexican workers were the lowest paid workers in the industry,

performing tasks like sewing, trimming, and homeworking (an illegal practice of taking garments home to be sewed off the clock) (Soldatenko, 1999, p. 321).

By the 1960s, a transformation was in process. An increase in “Latino/a” immigration (individuals from Latin America and the Caribbean who now reside in the United States), changed the ethnic composition of the area (Soldatenko, 1999, p. 321). While Mexicans remained the majority of garment workers, non-Mexican Latino/as entered the industry in large numbers (Soldatenko, 1999, p. 321). With more competition for paying jobs among ethnic groups, ethnic division and mistrust between workers of different backgrounds became increasingly apparent (Soldatenko, 1999, p. 324). Unfortunately, cases of intra-ethnic conflict also surfaced as ethnic minorities in and amongst themselves competed for the same low paying jobs (Soldatenko, 1999, p. 325).

In recent years many L.A. manufacturing jobs have vanished, after a peak in the industry in 1997, and a steady decline since (35,500 manufacturing jobs were lost from 1997 to 2004) (Pristin, 2005, p. 9). This decline is due to a shift to offshore manufacturing – the result of stricter labor laws in the States and cheaper contract factories over seas (Pristin, 2005, p. 9). There is still a considerable amount of manufacturing in L.A. but it is nearly impossible to know how much due to the large number of illegal operations and untraceable contracting arrangements. As explained by Kyser and Huang (2003), “many apparel ‘manufacturers’ do not manufacture anything” as they contract work out (p.1). It is also important to note that “‘apparel manufacturing’ refers to both manufacturers and contractors because it’s hard to separate the two in official statistics” (Kyser & Huang, 2003, p. 1). Another factor that makes tracking manufacturers difficult is the fact that “apparel manufacturing is a labor-intensive industry with low barriers of entry and low capital investment” (Kyser and Huang, 2003, p. 8). In other words,

it does not cost much to start up an apparel construction firm. Many illegal operations may pop up one day, without being legally documented, and exploit immigrant garment workers. When the government or other apparel industry officials catch light of such organizations, the establishment may shut down and be in business in a different location, under a different name within days (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000).

Before getting into work conditions and the existence of sweatshops in L.A., it is important to first understand the ethnic makeup of manufacturers and garment workers in the industry. As was the case in the early days of L.A. apparel manufacturing, the industry is made up of immigrant workers, almost entirely. However, as Bonacich and Appelbaum (2000) explain, “ethnic diversity in the apparel industry does not mean ethnic equality: Different ethnic groups play different roles” (p. 171). The general breakdown of ethnic divisions is as follows: “Europeans are overrepresented in managerial and white-collar occupations, Asians, especially Koreans, are overrepresented in management, and Latinos, especially Mexicans, are overrepresented among operatives and laborers” (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 171). Soldatenko (1999) elaborates on this fact in saying that, “manufacturers and retailers, by exercising their capital and power, have created a system of production that rests on a specific hierarchy of gender, immigrant and ethnic divisions, and privileges” (p. 328).

Hispanics and Asians dominate the manufacturing makeup in terms of production workers, accounting for 81 percent and 16 percent of all laborers, respectively (Kyser and Huang, 2003, p. 5). Two-thirds of these garment workers are women, and most have not completed high school and do not speak English proficiently (Kyser and Huang, 2003, p. 5). In terms of citizenship, about three-quarters of all laborers are non-citizen immigrants; only about 15 percent are naturalized US citizens (Kyser and Huang, 2003, p. 5). In general, the higher-

ranked the occupations in the industry, the higher the percentage of US-born people hold the position; the lower the occupation rank, the higher the percentage of non-citizens hold the position (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 174).

Now that the ethnic divisions and hierarchies have been established, the proliferation of “sweatshop” establishments can be discussed. First of all, the term “sweatshop” must be defined: “a factory or homework operation that engages in multiple violations of the law, typically the non-payment of minimum or overtime wages and various violations of health and safety regulations” (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 3). In a sample survey conducted in 1998 by the United States Department of Labor, 61 percent of apparel firms in LA were in operating in violation of wage and hour regulations (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 3). In one particularly appalling case, documented in 1995, immigrant workers from Thailand were held in slave-like conditions at a garment factory in downtown L.A. (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 165). The laborers, some working there for nearly seven years, were living and working in an apartment complex surrounded by barbed-wire, and were putting in over eighty hour work weeks for less than \$2 an hour (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 165). While this establishment was obviously shut down, it is frightening to think of how many other apparel firms may be operating similar businesses. Areas of the manufacturing industry that are especially hard to track are the levels of homeworking, as well as the existence and conditions of contract facilities.

Homework, an illegal, yet common practice in the industry, occurs when laborers take work home with them after putting in a full work day in the factory, or when workers operate strictly from home, making wages far less than those in the shops. In the case of homework, children are often involved, helping their mothers and sisters, taking part in tasks like trimming and sewing in violation of child labor laws (Soldatenko, 1999, p. 324). In a 1989 welfare fraud

investigation conducted in Orange County in 1989, industrial sewing machines were found in 70 to 80 percent of homes, a sure sign of the commonality of homework in the garment industry (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 184).

Unregistered, underground contracting shops are believed to account for between 25 and 33 percent of the total manufacturing firms in Los Angeles (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 166). Contracting is a popular system used by manufacturers to externalize risk, lower the cost of labor, evade moral and legal responsibility for violations of labor laws, and to help prevent unionization (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 136). By definition, contracting occurs when a major manufacturer hires other small (and often illegally operated) firms to complete garment assembly and sewing, or other individual functions like cutting, laundering, or finishing. It is at the contracting level that sweatshops flourish: workers become disposable factors of production that are used only when needed, labor costs are lowered as contractors compete for work from manufacturers, and manufacturers separate themselves legally from contractors (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000).

In Los Angeles, the primary ethnic group operating such contracting firms is Asian and the factory workers are Latino (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 141). This division of roles between two minorities creates a serious problem, as explained by Bonacich and Appelbaum (2000): “The contractors play the role of a middleman minority, outsiders to a hierarchical social system and serving as go-betweens, enabling elites to avoid direct contact with the dominated classes or racial groups” (p. 141). Basically, the primarily Anglo- and Jewish-owned manufacturing companies maintain a socially aware and conscientious front by allowing their Asian contractors to receive the bad-press for oppressed Latino workers.

Since its birth in the 1930s, the Los Angeles fashion industry has been a dual-natured business: an apparel manufacturing powerhouse that has been built upon foundations of ethnic conflict and sub par working conditions; and, at the same time, a trend-setting design center mixed with affluence and a laid back style. While the manufacturing realm has not seen a great deal of improvement over the years, the more appealing design, wholesale, and retail side of the industry has flourished.

The Los Angeles Fashion District Today

The fashion industry is made up of several international fashion capitals. In general, Paris leads the industry in terms of couture, London in cutting-edge street fashion, and Milan in luxury brands and fine fabrication. In the United States, New York City has historically been looked at as our nation's fashion capital, generating some of the industry's top ready-to-wear designer lines: from Ralph Lauren to Marc Jacobs. Designer lines have been shown during NYC Fashion Week since 1993. Fashion Week is internationally acclaimed and is swarmed with media attention every year. Ready-to-wear lines produced in New York are important to the make-up of the fashion industry. However, only a small percentage of the U.S. population actually wears items from these lines, on account of their exclusivity and often exorbitant prices. The mass market segment, the area of the fashion industry that dresses the nation, is based out of Los Angeles.

With years of being considered a fashion center second to New York, the Los Angeles industry has been taking strides to redefine the district with more prominence and industry respect. As of 2003, L.A.'s apparel industry was a \$24.3 billion industry, covering 90 blocks of downtown, employing 120,000 and "driven by design talent, economics, technology, and speed to market" (Kyser & Huang, 2003, p. 1). In terms of actual size, Los Angeles beats out New

York City, a \$22 billion industry employing around 96,000 (Kyser & Huang, 2003, p. 1). After years of being referred to as the “garment district,” downtown L.A. has been trying to reposition itself as the “Los Angeles Fashion District” (Pristin, 2005, p. 9). This modification has occurred through a decrease in manufacturing and an increase in both wholesale showrooms and retail establishments. Santee Alley remains in the heart of the district, once the main industrial district of downtown and now home to 300 stores stretching over two blocks of the district (Pristin, 2005, p. 9). The full district, “situated south and west of the financial district and to the north of the Santa Monica Freeway, is home to more than 2,400 ground-floor retail stores and wholesale showrooms” (Pristin, 2005, p. 9). As explained on the official L.A. Fashion District website, “Retailers, wholesale buyers, designers, stylists, students, shoppers and residents all converge” in this apparel industry hub. (www.fashiondistrict.org)

One of the primary catalysts in the recent push to promote the Fashion District and revamp the industry reputation has been the “L.A. Fashion District Business Improvement District” (BID), a non-profit organization of 700 property owners contributing over \$3 million annually, founded in 1996. The purpose of this coalition has been to produce a clean, safe environment that supports local businesses and builds a strong community of fashion professionals and consumers. Since 2000, over \$510 million has been spent on projects and development in the District. Such improvements have included new construction and renovation of retail and wholesale outlets, residential housing, and restaurants. Additionally, BID funds its own “Clean & Safe Team” because a clean and safe public environment is the number one priority of the organization. The 60-member Clean & Safe Team is on patrol 24-hours a day, seven days a week, working to maintain a positive public environment for the community. (www.fashiondistrict.org)

Beginning with the wholesaling side of the industry, the District boasts “The Intersection”, the joint promotional collective of wholesale showroom buildings and tradeshow producers located at the intersection of 9th and Los Angeles Streets in the L.A. Fashion District. Together, these showrooms form the West Coast center of the fashion industry. The four fashion industry leaders included in the coalition are the California Market Center, Cooper Design Space, Gerry Building, and The New Mart. Each marketplace offers a distinct variety of vendors and designer labels.

The California Market Center features fashion items as well as home and gift items. Some of the most well known vendors showcased include True Religion Brand Jeans, J & Company Jeans, and HOBLO handbags. Cooper Design Space is considered the home base for “L.A. Creatives”, offering studios and showrooms for fashion designers, media artists, and publishers. The Gerry Building is the newest addition to the district and features showrooms for professional buyers and sellers to do business. Calvin Klein, Levi’s Jeans, and Rocawear are currently tenants at the Gerry building. Finally, the New Mart is California’s exclusive contemporary and young designer apparel market space. The New Mart features high-end fashion showrooms for Diane von Furstenberg, Norma Kamali, Lacoste, McQ Alexander McQueen, Betsey Johnson, and Juicy Couture. Additionally, the tradeshow producer, Designers and Agents is housed at the Intersection. (www.fashiondistrict.org)

The coalition of these showrooms was formed in 2003, with the goal of building awareness of the LA Fashion District as a worldwide creative fashion powerhouse. In the over 1,200 showrooms in the buildings of The Intersection, over 4,500 lines are represented, making The Intersection a one-stop shop for buyers and retailers from all around the globe. Together, these showrooms and design houses hold 5 market weeks annually: Summer, Fall, Fall

II/Holiday, Holiday/Resort, and Spring. These market weeks take place about 6 months prior to the season and buyers from across the country and representing both national chains and privately owned boutiques take part in buying. Each marketplace holds additional market weeks individually throughout the year. These markets are smaller in scale and are directed at a more specific niche market, as opposed to the industry-wide full fashion weeks.

(www.fashiondistrict.org)

In the retail sector, the District's main shopping area is Santee Alley, a relatively open-air market place type shopping atmosphere. Retail stores in the Fashion District are typically independent – not brand name or chain stores that you will find in shopping malls. In over 1,000 stores that sell to the general public, shoppers can find hugely discounted items and have the opportunity to bargain with vendors. Many of these stores also sell at the wholesale level, offering quantity discounts to buyers.

In addition to the wholesale and retail apparel industries that thrive in the District, downtown LA also offers the largest selection and variety of textiles and notions found in the nation, and hosts multiple textile tradeshow annually. The L.A. Fashion District is also home to the largest wholesale and retail floral selection in the United States, the L.A. Flower Market (www.fashiondistrict.org). The rest of the downtown area is made up of art galleries, condos and loft spaces, and restaurants. As Ed Rosenthal, an investment broker at Grubb and Ellis Co. explains, “there is a tremendous amount of creative talent in the area that is bringing the district back” (as cited in Keough, 2001). The District has some of the highest pedestrian counts in all of downtown on the weekends and foot traffic has steadily been increasing in the ten years BID has been in action (Keough, 2001). The BID Executive director Kent Smith explains that the growth in the industry and emphasis on the dominance of L.A. as a national fashion capital was due to

the alignment of the community's goals: "L.A. emerging as a global fashion capital at the same time that district merchants are reaching out to accommodate the booming local demand for bargain-priced clothing" (as cited in Keough, 2001).

One way district merchants are supplying bargain-priced clothing that is fashionable and of-the-moment is by taking part in the "fast fashion" movement. When European retailers like H&M and Zara set the stage for fast fashion ("cheap and timely designer knockoffs and throw-away fashion"), California's locally launched chain stores Wet Seal, Forever 21, and Charlotte Russe jumped on the bandwagon (Barajas, 2007). This fast fashion movement has swept the nation with the spread of all quick-turn retailers, from both California and Europe. Fast fashion demands shorter lead times and more frequent deliveries (Barajas, 2007). With an expectation of quick product turnover by savvy shoppers, more traditional establishments like Macy's, Nordstrom, and Urban Outfitters have also been forced to shorten manufacturing lead times (Barajas, 2007). As described by Kyser and Huang (2003):

It is in this kind of environment that Los Angeles' apparel industry finds a niche – the market for custom-designed, low-volume, high-fashion merchandise that has a very short concept-to-product time. These garments require high-quality materials, agile manufacturing capabilities, close working relationships between the factory and the designer, and quick turnaround. (p. 11)

Barajas feels that this "need for speed" will force some brands with overseas manufacturing to bring production back to the US in order to shorten lead times (2007). Other factors that may bring manufacturers back to L.A. are quality control issues and difficulties in working on separate time zones with offshore and overseas manufacturers (Barajas, 2007). Many are optimistic of this new fashion direction as it potentially will bring manufacturing jobs back to a local industry that has sagged since the late nineties.

While at this moment BID and The California Fashion Association attempt to improve L.A.'s fashion district in terms of wholesale and retail sectors, an apparel manufacturing system built upon ethnic division and oppression has been in place in the Los Angeles industry for decades. However, if the Los Angeles Fashion District truly desires to be seen as a respected international fashion capital, the unlawful and secretive practices of the manufacturing industry will need to be eliminated.

The Future of the Industry

Los Angeles has come a long way in the last ten years. With a lot of hard work on the part of BID, the coalition of four major showrooms making up The Intersection, a growing number of retail outlets, rising amounts of patronage by retail and wholesale buyers, and increasing amounts of media attention, the L.A. fashion industry has grown into a multibillion dollar industry that still has a lot of potential. In order to gain the national and perhaps even international recognition, the L.A. Fashion District has a few essential goals to achieve.

An area of great potential for the District is in its L.A. Fashion Weeks. Formed in spring of 2003 (a baby compared to New York Fashion Week, an industry standard for the last decade, created in 1993), L.A. Fashion Weeks have steadily been improving and receiving more industry and media attention in the last few years (Apodaca, 2005, p. 14). After its first small group of shows for the Fall 2003 season, the Los Angeles Fashion Week doubled in size by the time of its Spring 2004 shows held the end of October of 2003 (Oldenburg, 2003). In the six months between Fashion Weeks, there was a 24 percent increase in first-time attendees, with retailers from 46 states and 25 countries attending the market week (Kyser and Huang, 2003, p. 19). With dueling production companies, Mercedes-Benz L.A. and SmashBox Studios, both vying for

designers, buyers, and fashion editors, as well as audiences filled with local A-list celebrities, the hype over L.A. Fashion Weeks began (Oldenburg, 2003).

Each season LA Fashion Week has grown, bringing in more big-name designers, as well as up and coming West Coast designers. In the Fall 2005 show top designers like Hugo Boss, Marc Jacobs, and Viktor & Rolf had all jumped on the LA band wagon (Apodaca, 2005, p. 14). Other fresh-faced designers like Jennifer Nicholson (daughter of Jack Nicholson and showing lines since the first L.A. Fashion Week), Louis Verdad, and Samora Olayan have shown lines in the last few seasons ("Put to the West," 2006). With a boost in show attendance by both designers and celebrities, an increase in the number of buyers arriving in L.A. searching for new product lines and resources has occurred (Apodaca, 2005, p. 14). Another addition has been the debut of Los Angeles Fashion Awards, which opened at the Spring 2006 Fashion Market Week (House, 2005). The awards were formed in order to celebrate "the energy, creativity, and vision that makes Los Angeles one of the world's centers of fashion" (House, 2005, para. 1). Further, the awards were made in hopes that L.A. would be recognized as a global fashion center that welcomes cultural diversity and nurtures creativity and artistic expression (House, 2005, para. 3). The awards focus on not only emerging talent and rising stars in fashion design, but also leading brands and retailers involved in the L.A. fashion industry (House, 2005, para. 2).

While L.A. Fashion Week has seen a great deal of growth and an increase in media coverage in the last four years, further progress will need to be made in order for L.A. to receive the international status it desires. The biggest requirement will be L.A. Fashion Week attendance from top consumer magazine editors. In Los-Angeles-based designer David Cardona's opinion, "It's going to take [high-profile magazine editors] from the three major fashion capitals to come here before we get coverage. If the three editors of American Vogue,

French Vogue, and Italian Vogue were to come, then that would give it relevance” (as cited in “Fashion Scoops,” 2004). In other words, if Fashion Week can get editorial coverage from the top publications, the rest of the media will follow. And if that coverage is coming from the three international fashion capitals, the rest of the world will take notice and start considering Los Angeles the fourth capital.

Another opportunity for market growth in L.A. is in the production and marketing of fast fashion items. Short lead times are becoming essential in retail buying in order to meet the consumer need for “of-the-moment” fashions. Manufacturing locally may be one of the most effective means of meeting this demand. By producing garments in the U.S. shipping times are drastically reduced. Additionally, language and time zone barriers will not affect communication between retailers, manufacturers, and contractors. As Bonacich and Appelbaum (2000) explain, “Los Angeles is a source of inexpensive immigrant labor; it is itself a major market for the goods that are produced, meaning that manufacturers can provide quick turnaround for local retail outlets” (p. 35). L.A. based fast fashion retailers Wet Seal, Charlotte Russe, and Forever 21 should take advantage of the current consumer trend and the accessibility of the L.A. manufacturing district and increase local production. “The key is control. The best retailers will be the ones who respond the quickest, the best.” (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000, p. 92). With the decrease in manufacturing jobs in the last decade, moving production from offshore to domestic (local, at that), will greatly help the number of unemployed immigrants in the L.A. area. Before this can occur legitimately, the negative manufacturing and contracting trends that have been so prevalent must be put to an end, or at least given more government attention.

Like it or not, the L.A. apparel manufacturing industry has a negative image (rightfully so with the amount of underground, illegal operations with unfit treatment of immigrant workers).

In order to turn this image around, governmental action needs to be taken to overturn sweatshop establishments and set higher standards and regulations. If these standards are not made public and are not understood by the manufacturers, no progress will be made. An over-riding corporate policy should be set for all manufacturers, contractors, and retailers who make up the L.A. apparel industry. Further, compliance agreements need to be signed to ensure that policies are put in place for the employees' benefit. Additional attempts should be made by the BID coalition of property owners and fashion heads to promote awareness of the issues. At this point, the manufacturing problems in L.A. are not receiving support from the million-dollar development projects. There can not be room for error if Los Angeles wants to be represented in a more positive light by the general public, as well as the international fashion community. The ethnic and social inequality in the garment industry has gone on too long and it is time to take more serious steps to alleviate the problem.

Summary

The Los Angeles fashion industry has come a long way in the last seventy years. From its Hollywood influence in the 1930s and 40s, through the introduction of American sportswear, and to the most recent phenomenon of fast fashion, L.A. has been a driving force in development of cutting-edge design. In recent years, the long-standing "garment district" was revamped and millions of dollars and community support have gone into making what is now known as the Los Angeles Fashion District. With the addition of Fashion Weeks and enhanced media coverage, Los Angeles may be on its way to becoming the next international fashion capital. As optimistic as many L.A. Fashion District leaders may be about this eventual success, there is one aspect of the industry that needs to be corrected before the city will receive any global acclaim: the downtrodden manufacturing trade. Unlike the other aspects of improvement and growth the

city's industry has experienced, the apparel manufacturing side has been built upon foundations of injustice and inequality, and has remained firmly planted there for over seventy years. Los Angeles has such potential, but that potential can not be met until serious worker empowerment and government regulation occur.

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